

December 2003



"It's amazing what a duck can teach you."
- Curt Ebbesmeyer, oceanographer

Here is the story of some intrepid rubber ducks who are out to circumnavigate the globe, or disintegrate trying. They began their quest in 1992 by jumping ship in the middle of the Pacific, and have been sighted at exotic points from Kamchatka to Hawaii to Iceland ever since. On the way, they have provided excellent data points for ocean current research. And while their color has faded from cheery yellow to bone white, their adventurous spirit remains, and their legend will live on in history.

Timeline

10 January 1992, somewhere in the middle of the Pacific Ocean

During a fierce storm, nearly 29,000 First Years bath toys, including bright yellow rubber ducks, are spilled from a container cargo ship in the Pacific Ocean (at 44°N, 178°E, in fact).



16 November 1992

Caught in the Subpolar Gyre (counter-clockwise ocean current in the Bering Sea, between Alaska and Siberia), the ducks take 10 months to begin landing on the shores of Alaska.

Early 1995

The ducks take three years to circle around, East from the drop site to Alaska, then all the way West and South to Japan before turning back North and East, passing the original drop site and again landing in North America. Some ducks are even found in Hawaii. The National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has worked out that the ducks travel approximately 50% faster than the water in the current.

1995-2000

Some intrepid ducks escape the Subpolar Gyre and head North, through the Bering Straight and into the frozen waters of the Arctic. Frozen into the ice, the ducks travel slowly across the Pole, moving ever Eastward.

2000

Ducks begin reaching the North Atlantic, where they begin to thaw and move Southward. Soon ducks are sighted bobbing in the waves from Maine to Massachusetts.

2001

Ducks are tracked in the area where the Titanic sunk.

July to December 2003

The First Years offers a \$100 savings bond reward for the recovery of wayward ducks from the 1992 spill. To be valid, ducks must be sent to the First Years, and must be found in New England, Canada or Iceland. Britain is told to prepare for an ‘invasion’ of the wayward ducks, as well.

UPDATE: Rubber Ducks Circumnavigate the Globe

2007 July 15

According to an [article](#) in England’s “Daily Mail”, the first “Friendly Floatee” rubber duck has been found in the UK. As predicted by oceanographers, some of the 29,000 rubber ducks (and frogs, beavers and turtles) accidentally lost at sea in 1992 are now beginning to make landfall in Britain. The wayward rubber duck was found by Penny Harris, 60, as she walked her dog on a Devon beach. Covered in brown seaweed and barnacle-encrusted, the faded and partially decomposed toy has been sent to manufacturer The First Years in order to claim the \$100 finders reward offered by the company.

Seattle oceanographer Dr. Curtis Ebbesmeyer, who has been tracking ocean-going oddities since 1991, predicts another wave of ducks will make landfall in North America in 2007. Dr. Ebbesmeyer's work in ocean currents, and the stuff that floats on them, has called worldwide attention to the issue of ocean pollution. It is estimated that 10,000 shipping containers fall into the ocean each year, adding to the millions of bits of trash and junk floating around the world. After decades of exposure to the elements, most garbage breaks down into a layer of plastic and chemical scum that is coating the surface of oceans worldwide.

Dr. Ebbesmeyer has a website about the ducks here: [Beachcombing Science from Bath Toys](#)

2007 August 21st

Marga Houtman creates a [Mother rubber duck](#) for the duckies to navigate home to.